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AUTHOR Eckert, Sidney W.; Allen, Thomas R., Jr.
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ABSTRACT

A survey elicited information from the business community on the written and oral business communications skills needed by entering first-level management and supervisory personnel. It also gave the business personnel surveyed the opportunity to evaluate the business communications competencies currently offered in college business communications classes and gathered information for revision of a business communications course. Questionnaires were distributed to corporate executives in the Fortune 500 list of leading American corporations; 100 executives returned their questionnaires for a response rate of 20%. Demographic data was gathered in addition to evaluative information. Respondents rated current business training's preparation for communication planning, attention to internal and external written communications, attention to developing communications systems, oral communication, and communication for gaining employment. Results show that the business community feels students need a thorough review of word usage and sentence and paragraph structure, instruction in specific forms of communication (letter and memorandum writing and business report writing), preparation for oral group presentations and group discussion, and training in the job application process. Specific curricular recommendations are made based on these findings. The questionnaire is appended. (MSE)

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**WHAT SHOULD BE TAUGHT
IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION
AS PERCEIVED BY THE BUSINESS WORLD**

Sidney W. Eckert, Ph.D.

and

Thomas R. Allen, Jr., Ed.D.

**Department of Management
John A. Walker College of Business
Appalachian State University
Boone, North Carolina**

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Sidney W. Eckert, Ph.D.
Professor

and

Thomas R. Allen, Jr., Ed.D.
Professor

Department of Management
John A. Walker College of Business
Appalachian State University
Boone, North Carolina

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since many business people state publicly that the most needed area of preparation of young business entrants is competency in both written and oral communication skills, we asked them to tell us which skills should be stressed in the business communications course. The recent survey that is being reported on in this study revealed what competencies in written and oral business communications that most business personnel in many large corporations in the United States thought should be stressed in the business communications course.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The major purpose of this study is to determine, from the business community, what business communication competencies are needed by entering first level management and supervisory personnel.

Specifically, the objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To determine from the business community, what business communications competencies are needed by entering employees.
2. To give business personnel an opportunity to evaluate the competencies that are presently being offered in business communications classes at the college level.
3. To revise the business communications course outline to further stress the competencies that are most emphasized and to include competencies that were not previously covered.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The results of this study will give teachers of business communications courses an opportunity to become familiar with what competencies in business communications graduates of colleges of business should obtain.

ASSUMPTIONS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY

In designing this study the investigators accepted the Allport position: that when given the opportunity to express one's self, the individual can and will respond in a valid and reliable way (Allport, 1953).

Since the data for this study will not directly affect the future of the respondents, it was assumed that they were not threatened by the questionnaire and that honest answers were elicited.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The following limitations were applicable to this study:

1. The study is limited to one hundred responses from business personnel within the last year in the United States.
2. The specific conclusions made in this study will be limited to the sample groups, but like conclusions, may be drawn to other groups with similar characteristics.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REMAINDER OF THE STUDY

The second chapter describes the population used, methods of collecting data and the organization and analysis of data. Chapter Three presents the data; Chapter Four gives the summary, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

Participants in the survey were obtained from the Fortune 500 list of corporate executives in the United States. One hundred (100) business personnel returned their questionnaires for a response rate of 20 percent.

INSTRUMENTATION

The instrument used to gather data in the survey was the Corporate Executive Questionnaire (see Appendix). Information asked for on the questionnaire included the following areas: description of the company which the executive represents, preparation for business communications, internal written communications of a business, external written communications of a business, developing communications systems, oral communications and communications for business employment.

PROCEDURE

The questionnaires were distributed by mail to corporate executives in leading corporations in the United States. A cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and need for a response was enclosed along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. The questionnaires were completed during the early part of the Spring Semester of 1986. A completion time of approximately two weeks was requested for the return of the questionnaires.

CHAPTER III FINDINGS

The results were determined by the analysis of the questionnaire. A summary of the data results of the questionnaire is shown as follows:

Corporate executives from each of 100 companies completed and returned the questionnaire. Also, the following results are based on the fact that 100 responses are equal to 100 percent.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Title of person completing the questionnaire:

President	5
Vice President for Information Systems	10
Administrative Assistant	10
Personnel Assistant	15
Senior Vice President	5
Secretary to the President	10
College Relations Representative	10
Director of Corporation Staffing and Training	25

2. Size of the company by number of employees

0-- 500	4	5,001-- 10,000	15
501--1000	2	10,001-- 25,000	18
1001--2000	6	25,001-- 50,000	15
2001--3000	20	50,001--100,000	5
3001--5000	15	Over 100,000	0

3. Size of company by annual gross sales in \$000

\$ 000-- \$ 250	1	\$ 5,001-- \$ 10,000	9
251-- 500	2	10,001-- 25,000	5
500-- 1,000	1	25,001-- 50,000	4
1,001-- 2,000	5	50,001-- 100,000	3
2,001-- 5,000	5	Over 100,000	65

4. Type of company:	manufacturing	75
	merchandising	10
	service	5
	financial	10

5. Location of company headquarters:

New York	14
Chicago	12
Los Angeles	10
Houston	5
Dallas	4
Atlanta	3
Cincinnati	2
St. Paul	2
Lawrence	1

REPORT BODY

(Based on Questionnaire Format and Responses)

1. PREPARATION FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS ON A SCALE OF 0-5
 ("0" = cannot rank; "5" = very important to include)
 The sample population gave an overall ranking of importance of the following:

A. The Planning Process	4.0
B. Word Usage	4.1
C. Sentence and Paragraph Structure	4.3

Suggestions: Stress planning and organizing before communicating.

Planning is most critical step.

Writing skills should be taught.

2. INTERNAL WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS OF A BUSINESS

A. Principles, Research and Theory	3.6
B. Memorandums and Forms	4.1
C. News Messages and Releases	3.4
D. Policy Statements	3.7
E. Handbooks and Manuals	3.8
F. Evaluation of Personnel	4.0
G. Report Writing	4.0
1. Short reports, memorandum reports and letter reports	4.5
2. Long research oriented reports	3.7

Suggestions: Students should learn to quickly and correctly write a memo.

Students need to write reports of 2-5 pages; providing feedback to direct reports is a key management responsibility. Students' writing should be short, concise and accurate.

3. EXTERNAL WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS OF A BUSINESS

A. Mechanics of Letter Writing	4.4
B. Format of Letter Writing	4.1
C. Types of Letters	
1. Sales promotion letters	3.7
2. Credit and collection letters	3.8
3. Letters of inquiry	3.8
4. Goodwill messages	4.0
5. Acknowledgement letters	4.2

Suggestions: It is important to be able to write a legible business letter.

Letter writing is an especially important skill in staff jobs; e.g., public relations overall, spelling, grammar, sentence construction and ability to express oneself.

4. DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS

A. Telecommunications	3.5
B. Electronic	3.2
C. Forms and Guides	3.5
D. Dictation	3.2
E. Regulatory and Legal Considerations	3.4

Suggestions: Make students aware of systems that are available.

Should concentrate on newest technologies.

Telecommunications is growing rapidly and students should be made aware of what is available.

5. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

A. Proper Use of Oral Communications Media in Business	
1. Dictating equipment	3.0
2. Telephone	3.7
3. Computer oriented	4.2
B. Levels of Communication	
1. Person to person	4.6
2. Media	4.1
3. Mass	4.0
4. Person to group	4.5
C. Group Talks and Presentations	
1. Symposium	4.2
2. Panel	4.4
D. Group Discussions	
1. Roundtables	3.7
2. Seminars	3.8
3. Meetings	4.4

Suggestions: Students should know how to present material and discuss material effectively.

Students should receive media training.

Emphasize "one-on-one" skills.

6. COMMUNICATION FOR BUSINESS EMPLOYMENT

- A. Written Application
 - 1. Letter of application 4.5
 - 2. Resume 4.7
 - 3. Letter of acknowledgement 3.6
 - 4. Job interview follow-up letter 3.8
 - 5. Letter of acceptance 3.9
 - 6. Letter of rejection 3.8
- B. Oral Application
 - 1. Interview preparation 4.7
 - 2. Interview follow-up 4.2

Suggestions: Students should know how to prepare.

Students should anticipate questions.

Students should know why they are qualified.

Interview preparation should be tailored to the individual--not a formalized "canned" approach.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY

PURPOSE

The primary purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the competencies in business communications that corporate executives feel should be taught in business communication classes.

POPULATION AND INSTRUMENTATION

The data was collected from corporate executives in the Fortune 500 corporations in the United States through a questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed and administered during the winter of 1986 after being developed and field tested by the researchers. A cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and the need for a response was enclosed along with a self-addressed stamped envelope. A completion time of approximately two weeks was requested of the respondents for the return of the questionnaire.

DATA COLLECTION

The questionnaires were completed by the corporate executives. When completed, the questionnaires were returned to the researchers.

CONCLUSIONS

Corporate business representatives' reactions to the proposed content to be offered in a business communications course reveal the following observations:

1. It was the general feeling of the business community that students needed a thorough review of proper word usage and sentence and paragraph structure.
2. The representatives of the business community felt that students needed instruction in specific forms of written communications including: letter writing, memorandum writing and business report writing.
3. There was significant interest in preparing students for oral group presentations and group discussion groups.
4. The representatives of the business community also favored the idea of training in the job application process both written and oral.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Several implications are believed to be of importance in the making of recommendations for course offerings in the business communications course. The following most frequently given recommendations of course offerings are based upon results of this study:

1. Students should receive review in basic writing skills including a thorough review of proper word usage and sentence and paragraph structure.
2. Students should receive instruction in written communication, specifically business letters, memorandums, and long and short report writing, with emphasis on short reports.
3. Students should be shown how to make small group oral presentations and participate in small group discussions. Special emphasis should be given to "one-on-one" oral interfacing.
4. Students should be shown how to effectively participate in the job application process, both written and oral, and be given exercises in both areas.

APPENDICES



Appalachian State University
Boone, North Carolina 28608

Department of Management

704/262-6222

February 14, 1986

Dear Corporate Executive:

WE NEED YOUR HELP!!!

We are conducting a major national research project to determine what business executives, like yourself, want from today's college graduates. This study specifically addresses the preparatory work in business communications skills and abilities of college graduates in business. Surely we cannot determine this information solely from our positions as college professors; it requires the joint efforts of both business personnel and college faculty.

Consequently, we are seeking your valued opinion and ideas to help us meet YOUR NEEDS as you hire your future personnel from the vast pool of business school graduates. In the questionnaire, on the following three pages, we have identified various topics and subtopics which are typically taught in most business communications courses in colleges and universities throughout the country. We, therefore, would like your input on the value and importance of teaching the items shown. Also, we have provided space for YOUR VALUED COMMENTS as you see fit to respond.

For future help when analyzing our collected data we are also requesting of you certain descriptive data about your company which we hope you will provide. If you feel the data is confidential or privileged, we will understand if you cannot provide.

Would you please take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire and return to us in the enclosed envelope. If at all possible, would you please try to return the completed questionnaire by March 1, 1986. If you are unable to complete the questionnaire yourself, please ask another qualified person to do so. Thank you very much for helping us bridge the gap between business and education. Please share your knowledge and expertise with us; it will be very helpful to you, the students, and to those of us who are teaching.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'Sidney W. Eckert'.

Sidney W. Eckert, Ph.D.
Professor of Business

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'Thomas R. Allen'.

Thomas R. Allen, Ed.D.
Professor of Business

WHAT SHOULD BE TAUGHT IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS AS PERCEIVED BY THE BUSINESS WORLD.

PAGE 1

DIRECTIONS: Please respond to the following demographic data as best you can regarding yourself and your company.

1. Title of person completing this questionnaire: _____

2. Size of company by number of employees:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 0 - 500 ☐ | 3,001 - 5,000 ☐ |
| 501 - 1,000 ☐ | 5,001 - 10,000 ☐ |
| 1,001 - 2,000 ☐ | over 10,000 ☐ |
| 2,001 - 3,000 ☐ | |

3. Size of company by annual gross sales (in \$000's):

- | | |
|--|---|
| \$ 000 - \$ 250 ☐ | \$ 5,001 - \$ 10,000 ☐ |
| 251 - 500 ☐ | 10,001 - 25,000 ☐ |
| 501 - 1,000 ☐ | 25,001 - 50,000 ☐ |
| 1,001 - 2,000 ☐ | 50,001 - 100,000 ☐ |
| 2,001 - 5,000 ☐ | over \$100,000 ☐ |

4. Check type of company:

- Manufacturing ☐
- Service ☐
- Merchandising ☐
- Financial ☐

5. Location of company headquarters:

State _____

City _____

DIRECTIONS FOR COMMUNICATIONS TOPICS: As you evaluate the outline below, rank the topics by circling the appropriate number according to the degree of instructional emphasis that you feel should be given to each. The ranking classifications are as follows:

- 0 - Cannot rank with data shown
- 1 - Instruction not needed
- 2 - Include, but with limited coverage of topic
- 3 - Should include with general overall coverage of topic
- 4 - Important to include with some special instruction coverage of topic
- 5 - Very important to include with specific instructional emphasis given to topic

RANKINGS**I. PREPARATION FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS**

	Specific Emphasis	Special Coverage	General Coverage	Limited Coverage	Not Needed	Cannot Rank
A. The Planning Process	5	4	3	2	1	0
B. Word Usage	5	4	3	2	1	0
C. Sentence and Paragraph Structure	5	4	3	2	1	0

Comments and/or Suggestions: _____

II. INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS OF A BUSINESS

A. Principles, Research, and Theory	5	4	3	2	1	0
B. Memoranda and Forms	5	4	3	2	1	0
C. News Messages and Releases	5	4	3	2	1	0
D. Policy Statements	5	4	3	2	1	0
E. Handbooks and Manuals	5	4	3	2	1	0
F. Evaluation of Personnel	5	4	3	2	1	0
G. Report Writing:						
1. Short Reports, Memorandum Reports, and Letter Reports	5	4	3	2	1	0
2. Long Research Oriented Reports	5	4	3	2	1	0

Comments and/or Suggestions: _____

III. EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS OF A BUSINESS

A. Mechanics of Letter Writing	5	4	3	2	1	0
B. Format of Letter Writing	5	4	3	2	1	0
C. Types of Letters:						
1. Sales Promotion Letters	5	4	3	2	1	0
2. Credit and Collection Letters	5	4	3	2	1	0
3. Letters of Inquiry	5	4	3	2	1	0
4. Goodwill Messages	5	4	3	2	1	0
5. Acknowledgment Letters	5	4	3	2	1	0

Comments and/or Suggestions: _____

IV. DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

	Specific Emphasis	Special Coverage	General Coverage	Limited Coverage	Not Needed	Cannot Rank
A. Telecommunications	5	4	3	2	1	0
B. Electronic	5	4	3	2	1	0
C. Forms and Guides	5	4	3	2	1	0
D. Dictation	5	4	3	2	1	0
E. Regulatory and Legal Considerations	5	4	3	2	1	0

Comments and/or Suggestions: _____

V. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

A. Proper Use of Oral Communication Media in Business:

1. Dictating Equipment	5	4	3	2	1	0
2. Telephone	5	4	3	2	1	0
3. Computer Oriented	5	4	3	2	1	0

B. Levels of Communication:

1. Person to Person	5	4	3	2	1	0
2. Media	5	4	3	2	1	0
3. Mass	5	4	3	2	1	0
4. Person to Group	5	4	3	2	1	0

C. Group Talks and Presentations:

1. Symposium	5	4	3	2	1	0
2. Panel	5	4	3	2	1	0

D. Group Discussions:

1. Roundtables	5	4	3	2	1	0
2. Seminars	5	4	3	2	1	0
3. Meetings	5	4	3	2	1	0

Comments and/or Suggestions: _____

VI. COMMUNICATION FOR BUSINESS EMPLOYMENT

A. Written Application:

1. Letter of Application	5	4	3	2	1	0
2. Resume	5	4	3	2	1	0
3. Letter of Acknowledgment	5	4	3	2	1	0
4. Job Interview Follow-up Letter	5	4	3	2	1	0
5. Letter of Acceptance	5	4	3	2	1	0
6. Letter of Rejection	5	4	3	2	1	0

B. Oral Application:

1. Interview Preparation	5	4	3	2	1	0
2. Interview Follow-up	5	4	3	2	1	0

Comments and/or Suggestions: _____